

Yesterday, on this floor, one of the Senators on the Democratic side said it would take 10 years before we would see any of that production. I don't believe that is true. But if it were true, I remind my colleagues that on November 20, 1995, we passed in both Chambers drilling in ANWR, and President Clinton vetoed the bill. We would have it today. We would not be having this problem.

I suggest also that there is one other facet that has not been talked about enough, and that is, we could have all the production, all the exploration in the world, but if we don't have the refining capacity, it doesn't do any good.

We were at 100 percent refining capacity even before Katrina. This is a serious problem. In our committee, we marked up a refinery bill, a very sophisticated bill, very moderate. It would allow those cities where they had closed military bases to use those closed military bases along with EDA grants to establish refineries. It is something that would enhance our refinery capacity and give us new refineries, and it was killed right down party lines. Every Democrat voted against it.

I will read what one of the papers, the Topeka Capital Journal, said:

Politics played a crucial role in Democrat opposition. If gas prices are high next year—

This is next year now—

the GOP will be blamed. . . .

Even though it is the Democrats who are responsible for it. So we have those problems that are looming at the same time.

I will say this: Democrats did offer an alternative when they killed the refinery bill. All eight Democrats on the Environment and Public Works Committee, the committee I chair, voted in favor of an alternative that would put the Environmental Protection Agency in charge of siting, constructing, and operating oil facilities. In other words, socializing that particular sector of our economy, which is something they apparently believe Government can operate better than people.

It is not true. When we had the LIHEAP program, I had an amendment that would have improved the permitting process for ethanol plants, as well as oil refineries and coal liquid facilities. Again, killed right down party lines.

I guess what I am saying is, we go through this and we see what is happening, and it is always down party lines when we try to enhance our ability to have natural gas. Ask farmers anywhere in America what is causing the cost of fertilizer to go up. It is a shortage of natural gas.

At the same time, we had an opportunity to do something in Massachusetts. Two Congressmen from Massachusetts, FRANK and MCGOVERN, put a provision in the Transportation bill that blocks the construction of an already-approved liquefied natural gas facility.

What I am saying is—and I know I am down to 1 minute, Mr. President—it doesn't seem to matter to the Democrats whether we are trying to do something with fossil fuels, trying to do something with oil and gas, trying to do something with clean coal technology, or trying to do something with nuclear energy. It always is killed right down party lines. Now the crisis is here, and we are going to have to face it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as Americans go to the gas pump to fill up their gas tanks with gasoline, they are met with a very harsh economic reality. We have higher gas prices in this country. We don't have enough supply in this country. Of course, we have lots of demand, and demand continues to grow not only in the United States but around the world.

As the Senator from Oklahoma said, we have been trying to take steps now for a decade to address this issue of shortage of supply. As consumers look at the prices they are facing today and the fact that we, for the past decade, have really, for all intents and purposes, done nothing to lessen our dependence on foreign sources of energy or to add to energy resources we have in this country, that reality is starting to take root. I think people are realizing that now for the very first time, and they are taking the steps they can to curb demand. They are carpooling, buying more fuel-efficient vehicles, probably walking more than they used to. I think consumers are doing what they can on their side of the equation to try to address the demand issue.

We have a profound supply issue that has been complicated by a decade of obstruction in the U.S. Congress when it comes to increasing that supply. We have tried for the past decade—I was a Member of the House of Representatives for three terms and now as a Member of the Senate. We have had the opportunity to vote on numerous occasions to explore and produce oil on the North Slope of Alaska. There is somewhere between 6 and 16 billion barrels of oil on the North Slope of Alaska. There would be 1 million barrels a day in the pipeline if, when in 1995 the Congress acted, the President had acted and signed legislation into law that would have allowed us to take advantage of that rich resource right here in America.

We have tried on countless occasions to add to supply. We have offshore production. Why is it that Cuba can produce oil off the coast of Florida but we can't? We have to do something to help ourselves, and for the past decade we have been blocked at every turn by our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, by the Democrats in the Senate and in the House, from being able to get into the resources in the State of Alaska and other places.

As the Senator from Oklahoma mentioned, we had a vote in the Environment and Public Works Committee on legislation that would allow us to expand our refinery capacity. It was blocked by a party-line vote. One Republican voted with the Democrats, but the Democrats voted as a party en bloc against expanding refinery capacity.

That is something, too, that we need to get done. I believe there would be a majority of Senators in the Senate who would be in favor of that, just as there is a majority of Senators who are in favor of exploring on the North Slope of Alaska and in favor of offshore production. But the rules of the Senate have been used repeatedly—repeatedly, Mr. President—to block the clear will of the majority when it comes to adding to supply so we can lessen the crisis that we face in this country, putting more supply out there to bring that cost of gasoline, that cost of petroleum down. We have run into constant obstruction in the Senate from our colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle.

So as consumers look at what they are facing today, it is important they begin to apply pressure to their leaders in the Senate and the House to take steps that should have been taken a long time ago and for which there is a clear majority of support in the Senate for exploration in Alaska, for building additional refinery capacity, for offshore production—for all these things that would add to the supply.

Having said that, I also believe it is not too late to do the right thing, and I have introduced bipartisan legislation with Senator OBAMA from Illinois that would help increase the use of renewable fuels to help meet the energy crisis, that would allow fuel retailers to defray the cost of installing E-85 pumps and other alternative fuel tanks at gas stations. Currently, only about 600 gas stations in the country have E-85 pumps. This would give many more Americans access to this alternative fuel and reduce our dependency on foreign energy.

There is more we can do. The President needs to push our oil-supplying countries to increase production to help ease this supply crisis.

Later today, I will introduce legislation that will provide immediate and short-term relief to American consumers. I will introduce legislation called the Gas Price Reduction Act of 2006 that will provide that relief. It will suspend the gas tax in its entirety for the remainder of this summer, until September 30, the period when Americans need the relief the most over the course of the summer months, when they are doing most of their traveling.

It calls for the elimination of the current 18.4-cents-per-gallon Federal gas tax on gasoline, relief that Americans will feel when they fill their gas tanks. The lost revenues will be reimbursed by temporary suspension of a number of tax credits and royalty